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ABSTRACT

This booklet offers suggestions to students on how to improve their study skills, with a focus on making more efficient and effective use of their study time. Chapter 1 presents tips for identifying one's optimal study conditions and getting organized. Chapter 2 focuses on time-management strategies, such as finding and using time to study. Ways to make study time more effective are described in the third chapter. Chapter 4 outlines the SQ3R method, which is comprised of the following stages--survey, question, read, restate, and review. Suggestions for taking good notes and ways in which parents can help their children study at home are also offered. Tips for preparing for and taking a test are offered in chapter 5, which describes how to match study techniques to one's learning style. For example, visual learners are encouraged to write lists of words and post them, make tables and timelines, and create flash cards. The use of performance portfolios as a multifaceted assessment tool is briefly discussed. In conclusion, students are encouraged to improve their study skills so that not only will they do well in school, they will continue to benefit from good habits throughout life. (LMI)

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ED 381 910

# Study Skills

EA 026 705

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# Introduction

Do you want to start earning better grades? Do you want to feel more relaxed when you take tests? Or do you just want to get your homework finished faster?

Whatever your goal, you'd probably like to improve your study skills in some way. This booklet can help you build valuable strategies for making the most of your time, now and in the future.

## You're Not Alone!

Have you ever found yourself scrambling to finish an assignment on the bus to school, pulled an "all-nighter" to write a major paper, or spent valuable study time trying to find out what the assignment was — only to discover you left a critical book or paper in your locker? While taking a test, have you ever glanced at the clock to find five minutes left in the class period, with one essay question left to write?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you're not alone. Many people don't know the best way to study. As a result, they may not learn as much as they could. Or, they spend so much time studying that they don't have time for anything else.

Most students could use a few lessons on how to improve their study skills. Whether you want to earn higher grades ... use your study time more effectively ... or improve your test performance, this booklet can show you how.

### A Note to Parents

We all want our children to do well in school. This booklet will teach your student some skills to make study time more efficient ... and effective. We've also included some parent pointers to help you!

We can't guarantee your student will earn straight A's, but the tips included in this booklet will help him or her learn to manage time, study effectively, and improve memory and comprehension skills — abilities that certainly help improve learning and school achievement.

*Smart is not something you **are** ... smart is something you can **become** if you work at it.*

## What's your SSQ (Study Skills Quotient)?

Lots of techniques can help you study better, but nothing can take the place of a good attitude.

Read the following statements. How many of these good study habits do you practice regularly, sometimes, or never? Your answers will reveal a lot about your attitude toward studying.

**Yes or no...**

- ☐ I have a regular time for homework. Even when I'm busy, I always manage to find some time to study.
- ☐ If I get a bad grade on a test, I work harder. I also seek help from my teacher, a tutor, or another student who is doing well in the class.
- ☐ I have goals for what I want to do after graduation. I know that studying will help me get closer to my goals.
- ☐ I'm usually prepared for class.
- ☐ I know how to break a large project down into smaller, easier steps.
- ☐ If I have a class that I don't really like, I work harder to make the subject interesting.

Do you ever wonder what top-performing students do to earn their good grades? You may think they spend all their time studying, but research shows that isn't true. Instead, these students have developed a method that helps them study *smarter*, not longer. This booklet will share some of their secrets.

Good study skills start with the understanding that there's no substitute for hard work.

# Gearing Up To Study

Before you sit down and start working, make sure you're aware of the best conditions to make the most of your studying. This is the first step to studying smarter.

*NOTE: Each section of this booklet begins with a list of tips that summarize the rest of the section. After you've read the entire book, you may want to refer to these tips periodically to refresh your memory and keep your study skills sharp.*

## Studying Starts at School

Students who earn good grades know that studying begins in the classroom. They take notes on what the teacher says because tests cover what the teacher thinks is important. (See the notetaking tips on pages 17–18.) If you listen carefully in class, you'll be able to pick up on these important points.

High achieving students also write down their assignments, including what books they'll need for homework. One good idea is to keep a small notebook or a calendar *just for assignments* that fits in your backpack or your pocket. Write down all your assignments in that when the teacher gives them. Having everything in one place will help you when you organize your study time (see pages 9–14).

As technology becomes more accessible, many schools are beginning to offer homework hotlines. This hotline is usually a regularly updated voice mail system that allows students and parents to call for information about assignments, tests, and other school events. However, school homework hotlines should only be a backup for your notetaking during class. Don't rely on them for all your information on homework and other assignments — computerized phone systems are known to break down!

### Get Organized

Have you ever panicked because you forgot your math book and have 20 problems to solve for homework? Then you know how important it is to bring home the books you need. Here's how one student,

### Tips for Gearing Up To Study

- Listen carefully in class so you'll know what your teachers think is important.
- Write down all your assignments, including what books you'll need.
- Use a small notebook or calendar to write down all your assignments in one place.
- Try putting yellow self-stick notes on the binding of any book you'll need to take home that day.
- Find the study time that works best for you.
- Make sure you have good light, a smooth surface for writing, and a comfortable place to sit for studying at home.
- Gather pens, pencils, writing paper, a ruler, and a dictionary as your study tools.
- Add a thesaurus, almanac, and atlas to your study tools, as needed. These items probably can be found in your school library or local bookstore.
- Soft music may help concentration and memory. Try studying with music on and off to see what works best for you.
- Never study with the TV on.

Maria, finally solved her disorganization problem:

#### "Flag" Your Books

*It was 9:30 p.m., and Maria realized she'd left her English book at school — again. She was going to have to turn in her writing assignment a day late, for a lower grade. But Maria also vowed that this would be the last time she'd be caught without the right books.*

*The next day, Maria brought a pad of yellow self-sticknotes to school. As she put a book back in her locker between classes, she stuck one on the binding of any book she'd need when she did her homework. Then at the end of the day when she was rushing to catch her bus, Maria didn't have to think — she just grabbed the books with sticky notes on them.*

## Find Your Prime Time

You've written down your assignments and remembered to bring your books home. But when's the best time to study?

Actually, there is no "best" time. It depends on you. So before you can set a study schedule, you need to find the study time that works best for ***you***.

Some people are night owls. For them, an evening study time will work best. Others are wide

awake in the morning, but fizzle out in the early evening. For them, the solution might be to set the alarm clock a couple hours earlier than usual and study before school. Other people like to study immediately after school so they can relax in the evening.

Experiment with your study time. Try mornings, afternoons, and evenings. It won't take long to find the study time that works best for you. Whatever time you settle on, just make sure it becomes a regular part of your daily routine.

**Night Owl or Early Bird?**

The time of day when I usually feel the most alert is _____

_____

_____

_____

## Where To Study

Deciding ***where*** to study is just as important as figuring out when to study. Here are the basics you need:

- Good light
- A smooth surface for writing (the kitchen table can work just fine)
- A comfortable place to sit.

Some kids seem to study better sitting at a desk with a straight-backed chair. Others learn better if they're sprawled on their bed. However, some teachers caution that your bedroom may not be the best place to study — games, radios, books, even posters on the wall could be distracting. Again, the best place is the one that works for you.

**I Need My Space!**

The place where I'm most comfortable studying is _____

_____

_____

_____

## Tools of the trade

A carpenter wouldn't think of starting work without a hammer. A doctor would never go to work without a

## Other Ways To Study

Is studying by yourself at home the only way to prepare for a test? While no one disputes the value of individualized study in a quiet place, you might find some of the following strategies complement your solo efforts:

- **Peer study groups**. Getting together with four or five classmates periodically to share notes and discuss lessons can be an effective way to review for upcoming tests. Each student might agree to summarize a different chapter or section, then share his or her notes with the entire group.

  In addition to informal study groups, many teachers are grouping students together for projects and other cooperative learning activities. For example, students in a government class studying the judicial process might be assigned different topics to research and present during a mock trial. To prepare, students would have to work together in and out of class.

  One word of caution: Make sure your study group focuses on the task at hand. If you and other students spend more time socializing than working, your study time would be better spent another way.

- **Tutoring programs**. There's nothing wrong with asking for extra help — in fact, it's usually the sign of a conscientious student.

  If you're having trouble keeping up in a particular subject, or if you just think a little more review and instruction would be helpful, ask a teacher or guidance counselor if your school offers any tutoring programs. Tutors might be other students your own age, older students from a nearby high school or university, or adults and other community volunteers. The programs usually are free and allow you to meet with your tutor regularly in one-on-one sessions.

- **Community resources**. Local libraries, community colleges, and universities can be a gold mine of study resources — often available at little or no cost. Some libraries offer students free access to on-line computer information services and other valuable research materials. Universities and colleges occasionally offer community workshops, speakers, or seminars on a wide range of topics and academic areas. You should be able to find out about upcoming events and services by calling the public information offices of any of these institutions.

stethoscope. Because studying is your most important job, you also need to assemble some basic "tools of the trade."

Make sure you have pens and pencils, writing paper, and a ruler. Some basic reference books are helpful, too. For quick checks, you can buy a paperback dictionary for a few dollars. A standard-size reference dictionary also is an excellent investment. (Checking your spelling may mean the difference between an A and a B.) Other books you might like to use include a thesaurus, an almanac, and an atlas.

These reference books probably are available in your school library. Schedule time either before or after school to stop by and use them. Or, ask your parents to make them available to you.

Just make sure your reference books are close at hand. Otherwise, you could end up like Ben.

*When Ben's parents found out that he was failing Spanish, they insisted he see a tutor. But even after several weeks of working with the tutor — and of studying every day — Ben's grade didn't seem to be improving.*

*Finally, the tutor asked Ben if he had a Spanish/English dictionary. "Sure," he replied.*

*"Then why didn't you look up this word when you were writing the translation?" the tutor asked.*

*"Oh, my dictionary is downstairs and I study in my room. So rather than walk all that way to look up a word, I just guess," he said.*

*Ben moved his dictionary upstairs, and moved his grade from an F to a C.*

## How about music?

Some people need absolute peace and quiet so they can concentrate. Others seem to do better with some soft music playing in the background.

In fact, researchers have found that for some students, *soft* music — not loud, pulsating music like rock or heavy metal — actually can help concentration and memory. Baroque music, such as Bach, with no words and about 60 beats per minute seems to promote the best learning. (Source: William Allman, "Mindworks," *Science 86*, May 1986, p. 23).

Do your own experiment. Try studying with the music on and with it off and see what works for you.

## TV Turn-Off

But researchers and educators agree on one thing: You can't study effectively with the TV on.

Television hinders studying because you need to have your eyes on your work. You need to pay attention to what you're reading, not to what's happening on television. So, when it's time for studying, turn off the TV.

### Parent Pointers: Do Computers Make a Difference?

Computers are wonderful tools. They can help students with all kinds of schoolwork, from researching a science project to writing an English paper.

If you're thinking of buying a home computer for your child to use, here are some tips:

- Ask yourself why your child needs a computer. If it's just to play video games, you should probably save your money. But if your child does a lot of writing, a computer may be an excellent investment.
- Talk to your child's teacher or principal to help you figure out the software you should buy. How much power and memory will those programs need? If possible, try to buy a slightly more powerful machine than what the software requires. This will make it easier to upgrade or add other software programs in the future.
- Consider subscribing to an on-line service that will allow your child to access research for preparing term papers and other projects.
- Think about how you and your family will use a computer. If your child is preparing to go to college, a laptop rather than a desk model might make sense because of its easy portability. Instead of writing, some students even use laptops for notetaking during class.

# Time Management ... or ... "I Don't Have Time to Study"

You probably feel like you don't have enough time to do everything you want. How are you going to find the time to study? The secret lies in making a plan.

## Find Out Where Your Time Goes

For the next week, keep track of how you spend your time — and be honest. If you spend 45 minutes talking on the phone and five minutes discussing your history project, don't write down "studying history — 1 hour." The purpose is to see where your time goes. Only then can you figure out how to use your time more efficiently.

This chart can help you keep track of your time.

| | Sun. | Mon. | Tues. | Wed. | Thur. | Fri. | Sat. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6:00 a.m. | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 | | | | | | | |
| 8:00 | | | | | | | |
| 9:00 | | | | | | | |
| 10:00 | | | | | | | |
| 11:00 | | | | | | | |
| 12 noon | | | | | | | |
| 1:00 p.m. | | | | | | | |
| 2:00 | | | | | | | |
| 3:00 | | | | | | | |
| 4:00 | | | | | | | |
| 5:00 | | | | | | | |
| 6:00 | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 | | | | | | | |
| 8:00 | | | | | | | |
| 9:00 | | | | | | | |
| 10:00 | | | | | | | |

Make copies of this blank chart for each week or make one of your own. Just be sure your chart tracks the whole day. Also, remember to fill in your chart at a set time each day — or you might forget about that two hours you spent listening to music at your best friend's house!

After keeping a chart for one week, here's how one student, Chris, found his time was spent:

**CHRIS' SCHEDULE FOR ONE WEEK**

| | SUN. | MON. | TUES. | WED. | THUR. | FRI. | SAT. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6:00 a.m. | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 | | | | | | | |
| 8:00 | | English | English | English | English | English | |
| 9:00 | | Band | Band | Band | Band | Band | |
| 10:00 | Church | PE | PE | PE | PE | PE | |
| 11:00 | | History | History | History | History | History | Soccer |
| 12 noon | | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch |
| 1:00 p.m. | | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | |
| 2:00 | Watch football on TV | Algebra | Algebra | Algebra | Algebra | Algebra | |
| 3:00 | | Biology | Biology | Biology | Biology | Biology | |
| 4:00 | | Track | | Track | Track | | Watch football on TV |
| 5:00 | | Study | | Talk on the phone | | Video games | |
| 6:00 | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower |
| 6:30 | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner |
| 7:30 | Watch football on TV | Study | Watch football on TV | Study | | Out with friends | Movie |
| 8:30 | Study | Study | | Study | | | |
| 9:00 | | Watch football on TV | | Study | | | |

**Out of control**. Even though Chris thought he was spending a lot of time studying, he noticed after keeping track that he only spent about six hours during the entire week on schoolwork. Half of those hours were on Wednesday night because he had an algebra test on Thursday.

Needless to say, Chris didn't get a very good grade on his algebra test, and he didn't get started on his history paper either. Although he planned to practice his trumpet, Chris never found time — and he'd been chosen to perform a solo in his school jazz band's upcoming concert. Chris felt out of control and unable to accomplish anything.

### Time Management Tips

- Keep a weekly chart to help track your time.
- Note scheduled tests and due dates for major assignments on your chart.
- Set daily goals.
- Break large projects down into smaller chunks.
- Use small bits of time, about 10 minutes, to review vocabulary lists, names and dates, formulas, or other facts.
- Watch out for activities that take up a lot of your free time, but don't provide much benefit, such as talking on the phone or watching television.
- Build time into your schedule for unpredictable happenings.

## How to regain control of your time

After seeing where his time was going, Chris decided to make a plan. Here's how he regained control and started using his time more wisely:

- **If you fail to plan, you plan to fail.** Chris had started each day without any goals for what he wanted to accomplish. As a result, he drifted through the week. Suddenly, it was Wednesday night and he hadn't studied for algebra. That meant a crisis, lots of last-minute cramming ... and, ultimately, not much success. To improve, Chris started noting on his chart when major assignments were due and tests were scheduled so they wouldn't catch him by surprise. Then, he set daily goals such as practicing his trumpet for 30 minutes and reviewing his Spanish for 15 minutes.
- **Learn the theory of "chunking."** Any large project is easier if you break it down into smaller, manageable chunks. Rather than trying to study algebra for three hours on Wednesday, Chris would have been smarter to break the studying up into shorter chunks starting on Sunday night.
- **Look for smaller bits of time.** Chris found even short amounts of time like 10 minutes could be used productively — for reviewing the week's Spanish vocabulary words or working out a few algebra problems. Now Chris uses short increments of time wisely and finds he has more time to do the things he likes.
- **Watch for "time robbers."** For Chris, watching football on TV took up a lot of his free time. After looking at his schedule, he decided that while he liked football, he didn't like it *that* much. Now he chooses just one game to watch ... and spends the rest of the time doing other things.
- **Allow some time for the unexpected.** Let's face it — sometimes things happen that no one can predict.

Schools are closed because of snowstorms. Teachers assign last-minute projects. A power failure wipes out your computer drive and English paper. Be sure you have some time built into your schedule to recover from these "expected unexpected" happenings.

After putting these tips into practice, Chris' schedule looked like this:

**CHRIS' SCHEDULE AFTER PLANNING HIS TIME**

| | SUN. | MON. | TUES. | WED. | THUR. | FRI. | SAT. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6:00 a.m. | | | | | | | |
| 7:00 | | Practice | Practice | Study Spanish | Review math | Practice | |
| 8:00 | | English | English | English | English | English | |
| 9:00 | | Band | Band | Band | Band | Band | |
| 10:00 | Church | PE | PE | PE | PE | PE | |
| 11:00 | | History | History | History | History | History | |
| 12 noon | | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | |
| 1:00 p.m. | | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | Spanish | |
| 2:00 | Study English | Algebra | Algebra | Algebra | Algebra | Algebra | |
| 3:00 | | Biology | Biology | Biology | Biology | Biology | |
| 4:00 | Watch football on TV | Track | Library | Track | Track | Biology | Watch football on TV |
| 5:00 | | Free time | Free time | Free time | Free time | Free time | |
| 6:00 | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower | Shower |
| 6:30 | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner | Dinner |
| 7:30 | Study | Revise notes | Study | Review for test | Study History | Out with friends | |
| 8:30 | | Read | Study Algebra | Read | | | |
| 9:00 | Watch TV | Read | Watch TV | Practice | | | |

After Chris set his goals, including practicing his trumpet and getting better grades on tests, he was able to move toward accomplishing them. He found, for example, that an hour in the morning that used to be wasted time is a great time to practice his trumpet and review Spanish vocabulary or work on math problems. He discovered that by writing his English paper a day ahead and then having time to revise it, he earned a higher grade. He also realized that by allowing himself an hour of undesignated "free time" every day he avoided the feeling of "all work — no play."

Try putting your own time management plan into effect. You'll be amazed at how much more you accomplish, and you'll probably find time you didn't know you had!

# Making Study Time More Effective

Now that you've arranged the best conditions and found the time to study, you want to make sure you get as much done in your study hours as possible. After all, you still want to have time to do the things you like! Here are some tips that will make your study time more efficient and effective.

## Use the SQ3R Method

Want to make your study time more effective? Try the SQ3R method. The letters stand for a five-step process that works.

**Survey.** Quickly look over the material to get the main idea. Look at the title. Check headings. Read the bold type. Look a pictures, charts, or other visuals. Turn to the end of the chapter to see if study questions are listed. This should be quick — spend no more than 10 minutes on this first step.

**Question.** Now that you know the main idea, think of questions to answer. As you read, ask yourself Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.

**Read.** Now it's time to read the assignment. As you read, look for answers to the questions you developed.

**Restate.** After you've read the chapter, see if you can restate the main points. This is also a good time to

### Effective Study Time Tips

- Use the five-step process that works: survey, question, read, restate, and review.
- Take good notes that summarize, not necessarily repeat material.
- Pay attention to clues that indicate when you should take notes.
- Use the traditional outline form to organize your notes.
- Emphasize important points with colored highlighter pens.
- Indicate points to remember with different styles of writing, such as capitals and italics.
- Take notes on both sides of the pages.
- Develop your own system of shorthand.

take notes on what you've read. (Notetaking is covered on pages 17–18 of this booklet.) Put what you've read into context with what you already know.

**Review.** At the end of your study session, spend a few more minutes reviewing. Did you find answers to all your questions? What else did you learn?

Here's how LaVaughn used the SQ3R method to study:

*LaVaughn's history teacher assigned a chapter on the major battles of the Civil War for homework. The teacher hinted that students might find a quiz on the material waiting for them the next day. "I'll never be able to remember all that information," LaVaughn thought. But she had just read about a new study method called SQ3R and decided to give it a try.*

*First, LaVaughn set a timer for 10 minutes. She didn't start to read, but looked quickly through the chapter. She noticed, for instance, that the chapter included a map showing where the major battles had occurred. She also noticed pictures of Generals Grant, Lee, and Meade.*

*"They must be important," LaVaughn thought. She also saw names of several other battles listed in bold-face type: Bull Run, Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg.*

*After scanning the information, LaVaughn began to ask herself questions: What were some of the most important battles? Where and when were they fought? Who were the most important generals on each side? Why did the Union win the war?*

*She wrote these questions down in her notebook and left some space beneath each one. Then she read the chapter. Each time LaVaughn found an answer, she jotted it down.*

*After reading the chapter, LaVaughn wrote a brief summary in her own words of what she'd learned. She also went back and took more notes on the most important points covered in the chapter.*

*Finally, she turned to the questions at the back of the chapter. LaVaughn was surprised to discover she could answer almost every one! She checked back in the chapter to find the answer she had missed. Then she put her history book away and felt a lot better about the quiz in tomorrow's class.*

## Take Good Notes

Some students fill page after page of notes. Others never seem to write anything down. Students who take notes best, however, are somewhere in the middle. They know their notes should summarize — and not necessarily repeat — material.

While listening in class and during independent reading, you need to take notes on the most important information. But you may not know what your teachers want you to take notes on. Here are some clues that indicate you should probably be taking notes:

- When the teacher writes on the board.
- When the teacher repeats a point.
- When the teacher's voice changes dramatically — either louder or softer, for example.

Although there's no single best way to take notes, here are some tips you may want to use:

- Use the traditional outline form (major headings are denoted by Roman numerals — I, II, III; smaller heads by capital letters — A, B, C; and subheads by Arabic numerals — 1, 2, 3).
- Use colored highlighter pens to emphasize important points in your notes.
- Use different types of writing, such as
  LARGE CAPITAL LETTERS FOR IMPORTANT POINTS
  *Italics, or cursive, for names of people*
  Regular handwriting for the rest
- To make studying for tests easier, take notes in two ways. As you read assigned material before class, take

notes on only the *left*-hand pages in your notebook. Then when you're in class, take notes only on the *right*-hand pages. That way you can line up what the teacher says with what you understood from the readings. It should be a quick way to see what's most important.

- Develop your own system of shorthand or symbols to write faster and keep up with what the teacher is saying. Look at the shorthand symbol chart for ideas on [this/next] page. (Be careful not to use abbreviations and symbols you won't be able to decipher later.)

## Write it in shorthand!

Consider using these shorthand symbols to save time when taking notes.

| Symbol | Explanation |
|---|---|
| > | Greater than, more than |
| < | Less than |
| = | the same, equals |
| C | century (C19 = 19th century) |
| ∴ | therefore, because |
| Δ | change |
| ≠ | different, not the same |
| ∞ | infinity, a great deal |
| w/ | with |
| w/o | without |
| → | caused |
| ⊙ | individual |
| ≈ | identical to |
| ~ | implies, suggests |
| Q | question |

## Parent Pointers: How You Can Help Your Child Study

Parents play a critical role in supporting students as they study at home. Here are some tips on things parents should — and shouldn't — do:

- Help your child find his or her best study time. Just because you're a morning person doesn't mean that's the best time for your child to study. (See "Find your prime time," page 4.)
- Make sure to stress a regular time for study every day. Some kids "forget" they have homework, but not if they know there's going to be an established study time every day. If your child really doesn't have schoolwork to do, encourage him or her to read a book or research a topic you choose together.
- While your child is studying, try to do some quiet work yourself, such as reading or paying bills.
- Praise your child's efforts. Help him or her see the connection between hard work and success in school — and in life.
- Try to keep books and other materials that reinforce learning around the house. Examples include newspapers and news magazines, crossword puzzles, and word games.
- Once in a while, your child will ask a question you can't answer. Relax, your job as a parent isn't to have all the answers. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know. Where can we look that up?" By doing so, you're teaching your child an even more important lesson — that learning never stops.

# How To Be Test Smart

Sooner or later, you're going to be tested on what you've been learning. But if you've followed the suggestions so far, you'll find that taking tests will be easier.

Remember the theory of chunking for managing your study time? Several shorter study periods are generally better than one long cram. If you've spent 10 minutes a day studying Spanish vocabulary words, you'll probably do better than the person who tries to learn them all in the hour before the test.

## Learn How You Learn Best

Do you know your learning style? Suppose you need to get to a meeting in an unfamiliar location. Would you want written directions and a map, or would you rather follow verbal instructions? Perhaps you'd prefer to just figure out your route as you go? Your preference in this scenario is a clue to how you learn best.

Researchers have discovered three main ways that people learn:

- By seeing (visual learners),
- By hearing (auditory learners), and
- By touching or working with things (kinesthetic learners).

***Visual learners*** understand something best when they have something to read or look at, or when they can see a picture in their minds. If you are primarily a visual learner, you might try these study techniques, depending on the subject matter:

- Write lists of foreign language vocabulary words and post them.
- Put up a table of the periodic elements.
- Make a timeline of important dates.
- Create flash cards to study vocabulary words for English or another language.

## "Test Smart" Tips

**Before the test:**

- Break your studying down into smaller time periods rather than studying all at once.
- Try writing lists, creating flash cards, and making charts if you're a visual learner.
- Create memory cues, read aloud, and use a tape recorder if you're an auditory learner.
- Act out a lesson from history, read while standing up, and study in short periods if you're a kinesthetic learner.
- Use all your senses to study.
- Create and use mnemonics to help you remember.
- Pretend you're the teacher and make up possible test questions.
- Prepare for midterms or final exams by reviewing old tests.
- Avoid all-nighters or cramming before a test.

**During the test:**

- Follow the directions carefully.
- Skim the test quickly to get an idea of its length. Note how much time you have to take the test. Wear a watch to keep track of time.
- Don't be afraid to skip a question and go back to it later.
- Check your work for careless mistakes.
- Be alert for word cues that indicate the wrong answer.

***Auditory learners*** use their ears for learning. If you are an auditory learner, you may be able to tell someone the answer ... but find it harder to learn if you have to write down responses. Here are some tips that might work for you:

- Make up poems, rhymes, or other memory cues. Example:
  *Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred ninety-two.*
- Repeat aloud dates you need to remember.
- Read aloud important lessons.
- Use a tape recorder.

***Kinesthetic learners*** are what we might call "hands-on learners." They learn with their entire bodies. When kinesthetic learners have to sit still, their brains seem to go to sleep. If this is your learning style, you might:

- Move around while studying. Try reading while standing up.
- Act out a lesson from history.
- Study in short periods, with a little time to move around between each.
- Use a finger to focus the eyes while reading.

Of course, everyone uses all three methods to learn. So even if you think you're primarily one kind of learner, different methods of studying for other kinds of learners will probably work, too.

## Be completely "sense-able"

Most people use all their senses to learn, and they are more likely to remember things that way. Here are some suggestions:

- **See it**. Use flash cards. Whether it's vocabulary words, history dates, or math formulas, a set of flash cards can go with you wherever you are. Then, whenever you have a few minutes, you can study the cards. You're likely to remember better if you make yellow flash cards and write in black ink.
- **Say it**. Say things out loud. Repeat them. (Repeating is the principle on which all advertising is based. If you can complete the phrase, "You got the right one ...," you have just proven the value of repetition.)
- **Sing it**. You may find that you can set the things you need to remember to a popular song. For example, one little girl sang "Old MacDonald had a farm, A E I O U" to remember the vowels.
- **Write it**. One student had to learn important dates in Roman history. She drew a simple picture to go with each date (a dagger for the year Julius Caesar was

assassinated; flames for the year Rome burned). Then she posted the pictures where she could see them. She found that she had learned half the dates just by making the pictures.

- **Hear it**. Does your family have a tape recorder? Use it to make your own study tapes. Ask the question, leave a few seconds for your response, and then give the answer.

## Use mnemonics

A mnemonic (nuh-MAHN-ik) is a memory aid. When you studied the colors of the spectrum, you probably learned ROY G. BIV (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet). Similarly, the poem "30 days hath September, April, June and November ..." is a mnemonic device.

As you begin to take more challenging courses, mnemonics are even more valuable. If you're studying British history, for example, you can remember the names of the first kings by reciting this rhyme: "Willie, Willie, Harry, Steve, Harry, Dick, John, Harry 3." (William I, William II, Henry I, Stephen, Henry II, Richard I, John, Henry III.)

## Test yourself

As you study for a test, pretend you're the teacher. Go back through your notes and see what the teacher talked about in class. Make up questions and see if you can answer them. If you're studying *Hamlet*, what are some points your teacher has stressed in class discussions? Have you compared and contrasted characters in the play or talked about major themes? These might be likely topics for an essay question.

When you need to study for midterms or final examinations, old tests are often the best place to start. Use the past test questions to review and test

yourself. It's helpful to keep old tests organized in one place, such as a file folder or notebook.

## Test Day Tips

Nobody's ever going to love tests. But by keeping a few key ideas in mind, you should be able to relax and do your best on exams.

- **Avoid cramming**. A good night's sleep is more important than an extra hour of studying. Anyway, last-minute cramming really doesn't work.
- **Follow the directions**. If the test says, "Show all your work," be sure to do so. If you don't understand something, ask the teacher to explain.
- **Skim the test quickly**. That way, you won't discover you have five minutes left in the class period ... with two essay questions to write.
- **Don't be afraid to skip a question**. Don't waste valuable test time worrying about an item you don't know. Instead, move on to a question you *do* know. After you've finished, try to go back to the items that stumped you.
- **Check your work.** Often, careless mistakes (adding instead of multiplying, for example) can lead to a bad grade.
- **Notice word cues.** On true-false or multiple-choice tests, certain words usually indicate an answer is wrong. Look for words like *all*, *none*, *everybody*, and *always*, which probably mean you can eliminate that choice.

## Show What You Know

All across the country, more and more students are being asked to show or demonstrate what they know... rather than just to select an answer from a list of possibilities or write down a memorized list of names and dates. Perhaps your school, in an effort to find out

how well students are really learning material, is using this new way to test, called performance assessment.

- **Writing.** Students use complete sentences to write a description, explanation, analysis, or summary. More complex writing tests involve students' evaluating an issue, solving a problem, describing a life incident, or reporting on various topics.
- **Oral reports.** Instead of getting up in front of the class, your teacher may assign you to use your school's video equipment to film an in-depth report. Or if you take a foreign language, your teacher will ask you to converse with other students out loud.
- **Exhibitions.** This often requires a student to produce a demonstration or live performance in class or before other audiences, sometimes involving other students. For example, you may be asked to show the historical significance of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech.
- **Experiments.** Mainly used in science, students use experiments to show how well they understand scientific concepts and processes. This could include not only a hands-on demonstration, but developing hypotheses, writing up findings, and measuring and estimating elements.
- **Portfolios.** These are collections of student papers, drawings, essays, and other work that are collected and reviewed periodically by the teacher. Often, students indicate to their teacher their "best work" at the time, as well as some works in progress.

How can you prepare for performance assessments? You may want to keep a running portfolio at home of your best material. Also, all the tips listed in this booklet, specifically those for organizing your time, breaking tasks into smaller chunks, and taking effective notes, are just as helpful in preparing for performance assessments as they are for traditional tests.

# Planting the Seeds of Success

Studying isn't something you'll do only as a student. Good study skills will benefit you throughout your life ... because learning is something you'll continue to do, regardless of your age.

For example, the same skills that make you a better student also help you do your job better, no matter what your profession is. Suppose you're asked to write a company report on an unfamiliar topic, learn a new computer system, or prepare a budget for future years. You'll need to know where and how to access needed information, and apply it to the task. Outside of work, you might use study skills to learn more about a fun topic that piques your curiosity or to accomplish a personal goal such as reading a work of literature or speaking a foreign language.

Improving your study skills is time well-spent. You'll get more out of your education, have more time to pursue things you enjoy, and be on your way to success in anything you choose to do.

Remember, smart is not something you *are* ... Smart is something you *become* with work and effort.

# Further Reading

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